

Driving In Iceland – Both On and Off Base, On and Off Duty

Because of the wonderful weather throughout October, it seems like winter has come to Keflavik overnight with a vengeance but it has been steadily creeping up on us. The hours of darkness have been extending bit by bit and now the rain and the howling winds have arrived. Blowing snow will soon be a reality too. All of these factors will increase the hazards of driving, both on and off base.

Unfortunately, throughout September and October the base has not done well in regards to traffic safety. There were 21 motor vehicle mishaps on base in September and at least 13 for October. Out of these mishaps, 4 of them required further reporting to the Naval Safety Center at Norfolk. In addition to base motor vehicle mishaps, the Icelandic community has also recently suffered severe motor vehicle mishaps, which resulted in 4 fatalities between the ages of 18-22.

These statistics are mentioned in an effort to get your attention. Most of these mishaps are unacceptable because they could have and should have been prevented. Speeding, inattention and improper backing are the main reasons for these mishaps. Since base personnel have been getting into motor vehicle mishaps in broad daylight with clear skies, the base will be in real trouble once full winter driving conditions set in unless something is done immediately about attitudes towards motor vehicle mishaps.

Proper attitude is a key element in every aspect of life but it is absolutely essential when considering the driving realm. Every person that gets behind the wheel of a vehicle **MUST** accept **FULL** responsibility for his or her actions while driving that vehicle. Each choice must be carefully weighed and considered before a final decision is made. Drivers need to realize that each and every move they make is a conscious decision that they have made. They choose to travel at, above, or below the posted speed limit. They choose to look behind their vehicle when backing or they choose to either use a spotter or not when they can't see behind them. Each is a definite decision that is made minute by minute.

Our goal should always be to prevent motor vehicle mishaps and, more importantly, prevent injuries and loss of life. Getting and maintaining the proper frame of mind is the first and most important step, but there are other driving tips that need to be reviewed.

Driving Tips

- ◆ Assess the road and weather conditions.
- ◆ Be familiar with the route. If unfamiliar with route, slow down and stay extra alert.
- ◆ Know the type and condition of the vehicle being driven, as well as the load.
- ◆ Know your own driving capabilities and your vehicle. Conduct a low speed traction test.
- ◆ Anticipate the actions of other drivers.
- ◆ **Slow down** in high-traffic areas and when inclement weather occurs.
- ◆ Increase safe driving distances.
- ◆ Watch for mixed road conditions, especially under bridges and at intersections.
- ◆ Avoid using brakes – use the vehicle's engine to slow down.
- ◆ Clear all snow and ice from the vehicle's windows, hood, roof, and trunk.
- ◆ If possible, brake or accelerate while driving in a straight line, not on a curve.

Backing Tips

- ◆ Conduct a walk around the vehicle to assess what obstacles are there.
- ◆ Have a guide direct the backing, if possible.
- ◆ Ensure that all windows are clean and that nothing inside the vehicle is obstructing the view.
- ◆ Ensure rear-view mirror and both outside mirrors are adjusted properly and are clean.
- ◆ Check all mirrors – physically look to both sides of the vehicle and over the right shoulder.
- ◆ Honk horn before backing, especially if the view is partially obstructed.
- ◆ Check the height of objects that are behind the vehicles.
- ◆ **Slowly** back out of parking space.
- ◆ When backing, don't turn too quickly – clear objects prior to turning.
- ◆ Park in spaces that eliminate backing, if possible.

Wind Warnings

As the hours of daylight continue to shorten, we are reminded once again that winter conditions have set in here on Keflavik. NASKEF instruction 3140.1S contains excellent information on both destructive weather and hazardous traveling conditions and includes information on wind chill, thunderstorm, blizzard, gale, and storm warnings.

This article, however, is going to address the wind warnings and the actions that need to be taken by base personnel. This is because wind is usually present year round, can be very variable in speed, and generally speaking, flairs up to a higher rate during the winter months.

A Local Wind Warning is issued by NLMOD (the Weather Office) when the sustained wind is forecasted to be between 20 and 34 knots; this is an advisory only. A Gale Condition is set when a Gale Warning has been issued by NLMOD and indicates a destructive wind between 35-49 knots is probable. A Storm Condition is set when a Storm Warning has been issued by NLMOD and indicates a destructive wind, with a sustained force of 50 knots or greater, is approaching. Weather warnings are marked on the "crawler" portion of the TV weather channel and on the radar channel. The color strip indicates at a glance the severity of the warning. Blue indicates normal conditions, green indicates either a Wind Warning or a Snow Advisory, magenta indicates either a Wind Chill II or a Gale Warning, red indicates Wind Chill I, a Storm or Thunderstorm Warning, or a Blizzard Advisory or Warning.

As the wind speed picks up, base personnel need to reassess their areas of responsibility, both on and off duty. Work sections and private residences both need to be secured. Conduct a visual security inspection of the designated area and preferably stow inside or secure outside any loose items that could cause property damage or personal injury. In high winds, NOTHING should be left unsecured.

Securing property is only half of the response needed. Preventing personal injuries caused by wind is the second half. Following these safety tips can help prevent or minimize personal injuries:

- ◆ Use common sense; don't go out in high winds unless necessary.
- ◆ Check the wind speed/direction before going out.
- ◆ When parking, if possible park in a direction so that the wind won't force the door shut or blow it open.
- ◆ When entering/exiting a vehicle, open one door at a time.
- ◆ Have an adult exit first and open a door for children, even ones who think they are old enough to do it.
- ◆ Hold onto children that are small and/or lightweight. Physically escort them into and out of buildings.
- ◆ Be extra careful around doors. Any draft, such as from a window or another door being open, can cause a door to slam shut hard and fast.
- ◆ Secure all items prior to going out; this includes coats, hats, backpacks, purses, etc. Anything with a strap on it can be whipped by the wind and cause an injury.
- ◆ Avoid moving materials, especially ones with long, wide, flat surfaces, if wind speeds are high. Try to wait for a calmer time. If this is not possible, ensure that all objects are secured and use help that is available.

Reflective Gear

It has been daily noted that there are individuals walking about the base during hours of darkness without reflective gear. NASFEKINST 5560.2F Chapter III, paragraph 7.g establishes the requirement for reflective gear and states it very clearly; "Pedestrians shall wear reflective devices or tape on their outer garments during the hours of darkness, so that they are visible to vehicular traffic." This is **NOT** a suggestion, but a mandate – **WEAR IT!!!!**

Safety reflectors may be picked up at the Safety Department, building 782 between the hours of 0800-1700. Each command and department is encouraged to purchase reflective belts or armbands or reflective tape for their active duty personnel. These items may be ordered through the One Touch System.

For dependents and individuals that would like to purchase their own reflective gear, the Navy Exchange has reflective items for sale in the military clothing section.